

**Opening Statement before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform**

The Honorable Gordon D. Sondland
U.S. Ambassador to the European Union

October 17, 2019

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to provide this testimony today. I was disappointed that the State Department prevented me, at the last minute, from testifying earlier on October 8, 2019. But your issuance of a subpoena has supported my appearance here today. I am pleased to provide the following testimony:

First, let me say that it is an honor to serve the people of the United States as their Ambassador to the European Union. The U.S. Mission to the EU is the direct link between the United States and the 28 member EU countries, America's longest standing allies and one of the largest economic blocks in the world. A strong, united, and peaceful Europe helps to uphold the norms that maintain political stability and promote economic prosperity around the world.

Second, I would like to thank my staff and the many dedicated public servants with whom I have the privilege to work every day. I have benefited immeasurably from their collective wisdom, experience, and hard work. Their patriotism serves as an example to all of us.

Third, let me note that my goal today is to answer your questions directly and clearly, to the best of my knowledge. I have not shared this Opening Statement in advance with either the White House or the State Department. These are my own words. It is important to emphasize, at the outset, that I have had limited time to review the relevant facts in order to prepare for my testimony. I will do my utmost to answer the Committees' questions fully and truthfully, but the shortness of time is challenging.

Let me also say that I have good friends from both sides of the aisle, many of whom have reached out to me to provide support. As we go through this process, I understand that some people may have their own specific agendas: some may want me to say things to protect the President at all costs; some may want me to provide damning facts to support the other side. But none of that matters to me. I have no interest in pursuing higher office or taking political shots. Simply put, I am **NOT** here to push an agenda. I am here to tell the truth.

Personal Background

I am a lifelong Republican. Like all of my political Ambassadorial colleagues, I am an appointee of the President and serve at the pleasure of the President. I also know that party affiliations are set aside when representing the United States. Having served on non-partisan commissions by the appointment of three Democratic governors and on the transition team for Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, another Democrat, I am well accustomed to working across the aisle. For example, I worked briefly with former Vice President Biden's office in connection with the Vice President's nationwide anti-cancer initiative and admire his long record of public service. I had bipartisan support for my ambassadorial nomination. My successful business

background and results-oriented focus made me, in my view, well suited to bring the fresh perspective to U.S. foreign policy that President Trump had sought.

UKRAINE PORTFOLIO

As you know, I was confirmed by the Senate in a bipartisan voice vote as Ambassador to the EU on June 28, 2018, and I assumed that role in Brussels on July 9, 2018.

From my very first days as Ambassador, Ukraine has been a part of my broader work pursuing U.S. national interests. Ukraine's political and economic development are critical to the long-lasting stability of Europe. Moreover, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, which began nearly five years ago, continues as one of the most significant security crises for Europe and the United States. As the U.S. Ambassador to the EU, I have always viewed my Ukraine work as central to advancing U.S.-EU foreign policy. Indeed, for decades, under both Republican and Democrat Administrations, the United States has viewed Ukraine with strategic importance, in part to counter Russian aggression in Europe and to support Ukraine energy independence. My involvement in issues concerning Ukraine, while a small part of my overall portfolio, was nevertheless central to my ambassadorial responsibilities. In this sense, Ukraine is similar to other non-EU countries, such as Venezuela, Iran, and Georgia, with respect to which my Mission and I coordinate closely with our EU partners to promote policies that reflect our common values and interests. I always endeavoured to keep my State Department and National Security Council colleagues informed of my actions and to seek their input.

I understand that all my actions involving Ukraine had the blessing of Secretary Pompeo as my work was consistent with long-standing U.S. foreign policy objectives. Indeed, very recently, Secretary Pompeo sent me a congratulatory note that I was doing great work, and he encouraged me to keep banging away.

KEY TIMELINE

While I continue my work in Europe, here in Washington, there continues to be inaccurate and unsourced speculation regarding my work in Ukraine. To be helpful, as you frame your questions, let me share an outline of the facts:

First, as Ambassador to the EU, my Ukraine portfolio began on Day One, from the very first briefing materials I received in the **Summer of 2018**. Although it did not consistently occupy a great deal of my time, involvement in Ukraine matters was considered by the career professionals who prepared my briefing materials to be an important part of my portfolio.

On **July 13, 2018**, just four days after assuming my post, I received a delegation from the government of Ukraine at the U.S. Mission in Brussels. This meeting was sought by the then-Ukraine government and, like most meetings, was proposed and arranged by career EU Mission staff.

Following those initial contacts, I attended numerous meetings in Brussels and other locations in Europe during the **Fall of 2018** to advance U.S. interests in Ukraine. These interests reflect a whole of government engagement, not just a narrow focus. We discussed economic

development, energy independence, and security concerns regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine. From my position in Brussels, my goal has always been to facilitate and expedite the integration of Ukraine into the broader Western norms of Europe and the United States.

To be clear, my role has been to support my colleagues in the State Department for whom Ukraine issues are a full-time job and to lend my voice when helpful. These professionals included first and foremost the Head of Mission, which at the start of my service was Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch and, more recently, Charge de Affaires William Taylor and their Embassy staff.

I worked with Ambassador Yovanovitch personally during my first official visit to Ukraine in February 2019, and I found her to be an excellent diplomat with a deep command of Ukrainian internal dynamics, the U.S.-Ukraine relationship, and associated regional issues. She was a delight to work with during our visit to Odessa, Ukraine. I was never a part of any campaign to disparage or dislodge her, and I regretted her departure.

Similarly, in my time working with Ambassador Taylor, I have found him to be an insightful, strategic, and effective representative of U.S. interests. He cares deeply about the future of Ukraine and is a dedicated public servant. The Ukraine Mission worked hand in hand with Special Envoy Kurt Volker, another experienced diplomat with a special remit to address the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Mr. Volker is an exemplary professional.

I viewed my role as adding value to the broader efforts of the Ukraine team through my engagements with high level leadership in Brussels and Washington.

During my first official trip to Ukraine on February 26, 2019, I traveled to Odessa with Special Envoy Kurt Volker, former EU Deputy Secretary General Jean Christophe-Belliard, a representative of the Romanian EU Presidency, and many other officials. Joined by Ambassador Yovanovitch, U.S. Navy Commander Matthew Powell, and many others, we met with then-Ukraine President Poroshenko on the U.S. Navy ship Donald J. Cook. This visit demonstrated the U.S. military's commitment to Ukraine and furthered our broader agenda of aligning with our EU partners to counterbalance Russian influence in the region. This visit followed on the heels of a Congressional Delegation to Brussels led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi. This delegation met with me and senior EU leadership.

In these meetings in Brussels and Odessa, as in nearly every meeting in which Ukraine issues were discussed, corruption and rule of law were central topics of conversation. Corruption poses challenges to the legitimacy and stability of government; corruption is also an economic issue. Successive Ukrainian governments have sought to attract Western investors as a counterbalance to Russian interference and oligarch control of key Ukrainian companies. Western investment is fully in the strategic interests of the United States and our EU partners. However, efforts to access private markets have been made extremely difficult by the long-standing corruption. As one example, we frequently had conversations with Ukrainian leaders about transparency and corporate governance issues involving Naftogaz. In my experience, these issues have been the consistent context in which both my team and our Ukraine

counterparts have raised corruption problems for many years. We have received very positive feedback from the NSC regarding our joint efforts to address these challenges in Ukraine.

On **April 21, 2019**, Volodymyr Zelensky was elected President of Ukraine, beating incumbent President Petro Poroshenko with nearly 73% of the vote. This was a momentous event in Ukraine political history and for the overall U.S.-Ukraine relationship.

On **May 20, 2019**, given the significance of this election, I attended the inauguration of President Zelensky as part of the U.S. delegation led by U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry, along with Senator Ron Johnson, Special Envoy Volker, and Alex Vindman from the NSC. During this visit, we developed positive views of the new Ukraine President and his desire to promote a stronger relationship between Kiev and Washington, to make reforms necessary to attract Western economic investment, and to address Ukraine's well-known and longstanding corruption issues.

On **May 23, 2019**, three days after the Zelensky inauguration, we in the U.S. delegation debriefed President Trump and key aides at the White House. We emphasized the strategic importance of Ukraine and the strengthening relationship with President Zelensky, a reformer who received a strong mandate from the Ukrainian people to fight corruption and pursue greater economic prosperity. We asked the White House to arrange a working phone call from President Trump and a working Oval Office visit. However, President Trump was skeptical that Ukraine was serious about reforms and anti-corruption, and he directed those of us present at the meeting to talk to Mr. Giuliani, his personal attorney, about his concerns. It was apparent to all of us that

the key to changing the President's mind on Ukraine was Mr. Giuliani. It is my understanding that Energy Secretary Perry and Special Envoy Volker took the lead on reaching out to Mr. Giuliani, as the President had directed.

Indeed, Secretary Perry, Ambassador Volker, and I were disappointed by our May 23, 2019 White House debriefing. We strongly believed that a call and White House meeting between Presidents Trump and Zelensky was important and that these should be scheduled promptly and without any pre-conditions. We were also disappointed by the President's direction that we involve Mr. Giuliani. Our view was that the men and women of the State Department, not the President's personal lawyer, should take responsibility for all aspects of U.S. foreign policy towards Ukraine. However, based on the President's direction, we were faced with a choice: We could abandon the goal of a White House meeting for President Zelensky, which we all believed was crucial to strengthening U.S.-Ukrainian ties and furthering long-held U.S. foreign policy goals in the region; or we could do as President Trump directed and talk to Mr. Giuliani to address the President's concerns.

We chose the latter path, which seemed to all of us – Secretary Perry, Ambassador Volker, and myself – to be the better alternative. But I did not understand, until much later, that Mr. Giuliani's agenda might have also included an effort to prompt the Ukrainians to investigate Vice President Biden or his son or to involve Ukrainians, directly or indirectly, in the President's 2020 reelection campaign.

Following my return to Brussels and continuing my focus on stronger U.S.-EU ties, my Mission hosted a U.S. Independence Day event on **June 4, 2019**. Despite press reports, this event was planned months in advance and involved approximately 700 guests from government, the diplomatic corps, the media, business, and civil society. The night featured remarks by the Ambassador and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs. Following the main event, we hosted a smaller, separate dinner for about 30 people. President Zelensky and several other leaders of EU and non-EU member states attended the dinner, along with Secretary Perry, U.S. State Department Counselor Ulrich Brechbuhl on behalf of Secretary Pompeo, and numerous other key U.S. and EU officials. Though planned long in advance with the focus on improving transatlantic relations, we also viewed this event as an opportunity to present President Zelensky to various EU and U.S. officials and to build upon the enhanced government ties. The event was well-received. Contrary to some reporting, Bono did not attend or perform.

During a trip to Washington on **July 10, 2019**, with the express, advance invitation of Ambassador Bolton, I joined White House meetings between representatives of Ukraine National Security and Defense with U.S. NSC officials, including Ambassador Bolton, along with Secretary Perry and Ambassador Volker. I understood following the meeting, as reflected in the summary of a phone call the next day between Secretary Perry and Ambassador Bolton, that there was a difference of opinion between Secretary Perry, Ambassador Volker, and myself, on the one hand, and the NSC, on the other. We three favored promptly scheduling a call and meeting between Presidents Trump and Zelensky; the NSC did not.

But if Ambassador Bolton, Dr. Hill, or others harbored any misgivings about the propriety of what we were doing, they never shared those misgivings with me, then or later. We had regular communications with the NSC about Ukraine, both before and after the July meeting; and neither Ambassador Bolton, Dr. Hill, nor anyone else on the NSC staff ever expressed any concerns to me about our efforts, any complaints about coordination between State and the NSC, or, most importantly, any concerns that we were acting improperly. Furthermore, my boss Secretary Pompeo was very supportive of our Ukraine strategy.

After a series of delays, on **July 25, 2019**, President Trump called President Zelensky to congratulate him on the recently concluded Ukraine parliamentary elections, which in Ukraine are separate from the Presidential elections. This was an important call, and I was pleased to hear that it occurred.

But let me emphasize: I was not on that July 25, 2019 call and I did not see a transcript of that call until **September 25, 2019**, when the White House publicly released it. None of the brief and general call summaries I received contained any mention of Burisma or former Vice President Biden, nor even suggested that President Trump had made any kind of request of President Zelensky. I had heard afterwards that the July 25, 2019 call went well in solidifying a relationship between the two leaders.

On **July 26, 2019**, Special Envoy Volker and I, along with others, met with President Zelensky in Kiev, Ukraine. This was a significant bilateral meeting, involving large teams from the United States and Ukraine, that had been planned by Special Envoy Volker's team weeks in

advance and was not in any way tied to the July 25, 2019 White House call. I was invited to this meeting in early July. Indeed, as we planned the Kiev meeting, we did not know when or even if the White House call would occur.

During this July 26, 2019 meeting in Kiev, we were able to promote further engagement, including discussions about a future Zelensky visit to the White House. I do recall a brief discussion with President Trump before my visit to Kiev. That call was very short, non-substantive, and did not encompass any of the substance of the July 25, 2019 White House call with President Zelensky.

Finally, the White House and NSC invited me to the United Nations for the first face-to-face meeting between Presidents Trump and Zelensky in New York City, which I attended on **September 25, 2019**. This was a positive meeting, and I am pleased that the leaders were able to meet for the first time face-to-face.

CLARIFYING OTHER ISSUES

Given the various misstatements in the press, I want to take this time to clarify several issues, including questions involving the Ukraine public statement, the involvement of former Mayor Giuliani, and other alleged issues.

Ukraine Public Statement

First, I knew that a public embrace of anti-corruption reforms by Ukraine was one of the pre-conditions for securing a White House meeting with President Zelensky. My view was, and has always been, that such Western reforms are consistent with U.S. support for rule of law in Ukraine going back decades, under both Republican and Democrat administrations. Nothing about that request raised any red flags for me, Ambassador Volker, or Ambassador Taylor.

Consequently, I supported the efforts of Ambassador Volker to encourage the Ukrainian government to adopt a public statement setting out its reform priorities. My recollection is that the statement was written primarily by the Ukrainians with Ambassador Volker's guidance, and I offered my assistance when asked. This was the "deliverable" referenced in some of my messages – a deliverable/public statement that President Trump wanted to see or hear before a White House meeting could occur. The fact that we were working on this public statement was not a secret. More broadly, such public statements are a common and necessary part of U.S. diplomacy. Requesting that parties align their public messaging in advance of any important leadership meeting is a routine way to leverage the power of a face-to-face exchange.

Rudy Giuliani

Second, there has been much press speculation about my own interactions with Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani. To the best of my recollection, I met Mr. Giuliani in person only once at a reception when I briefly shook his hand in 2016. This was before I became Ambassador to the EU. In contrast, during my time as Ambassador, I do not recall having ever met with Mr. Giuliani in person, and I only spoke with him a few times.

Ambassador Volker introduced me to Mr. Giuliani electronically. My best recollection is that I spoke with Mr. Giuliani for the first time in early August 2019, after the congratulatory phone call from President Trump on July 25, 2019 and after the bilateral meeting with President Zelensky on July 26, 2019 in Kiev. My recollection is that Mr. Giuliani and I actually spoke no more than two or three times by phone, for about a few minutes each time.

As I stated earlier, I understood from President Trump, at the May 23, 2019 White House debriefing, that he wanted the Inaugural Delegation to talk with Mr. Giuliani concerning our efforts to arrange a White House meeting for President Zelensky. Taking direction from the President, as I must, I spoke with Mr. Giuliani for that limited purpose. In these short conversations, Mr. Giuliani emphasized that the President wanted a public statement from President Zelensky committing Ukraine to look into anticorruption issues. Mr. Giuliani specifically mentioned the 2016 election (including the DNC server) and Burisma as two anti-corruption investigatory topics of importance for the President.

Let me be clear: Mr. Giuliani does not work for me or my Mission and I do not know what official or unofficial role, if any, he has with the State Department. To my knowledge, he is one of the President's personal lawyers. However, my understanding was that the President directed Mr. Giuliani's participation, that Mr. Giuliani was expressing the concerns of the President, and that Mr. Giuliani had already spoken with Secretary Perry and Ambassador Volker.

Ten weeks after the President on May 23, 2019 directed the Inaugural Delegation to talk with Mr. Giuliani, I had my first phone conversation with him in early August 2019. I listened to Mr. Giuliani's concerns. My goal was to keep the focus on Ukraine and the strengthened relationship with the United States.

Please know that I would not have recommended that Mr. Giuliani or any private citizen be involved in these foreign policy matters. However, given the President's explicit direction, as well as the importance we attached to arranging a White House meeting between Presidents Trump and Zelensky, we agreed to do as President Trump directed.

Former Vice President Biden/Hunter Biden

Third, given many inaccurate press reports, let me be clear about the following: I do not recall that Mr. Giuliani discussed Former Vice President Biden or his son Hunter Biden with me. Like many of you, I read the transcript of the Trump-Zelensky call for the first time when it was released publicly by the White House on September 25, 2019.

Although Mr. Giuliani did mention the name “Burisma” in August 2019, I understood that Burisma was one of many examples of Ukrainian companies run by oligarchs and lacking the type of corporate governance structures found in Western companies. I did not know until more recent press reports that Hunter Biden was on the board of Burisma.

Again, I recall no discussions with any State Department or White House official about Former Vice President Biden or his son, nor do I recall taking part in any effort to encourage an investigation into the Bidens.

NSC/Ambassador Bolton

Fourth, I worked hard to keep the National Security Council, including Ambassador Bolton and Dr. Hill, apprised of our Ukrainian efforts. In fact, sometime in June 2019, Secretary Perry organized a conference call with Ambassador Bolton, Ambassador Volker, myself, and others. We went over the entire Ukraine strategy with Ambassador Bolton, who agreed with the strategy and signed off on it. Indeed, over the spring and summer of 2019, I received nothing but cordial responses from Ambassador Bolton and Dr. Hill. Nothing was ever raised to me about any concerns regarding our Ukrainian policy.

While I have not seen Dr. Hill’s testimony, I am surprised and disappointed by the media reports of her critical comments. To put it clearly: Neither she nor Ambassador Bolton shared any critical comments with me, even after our July 10, 2019 White House meeting. And so, I have to view her testimony — if the media reports are accurate — as the product of hindsight and in the context of the widely known tensions between the NSC, on the one hand, and the State

Department, on the other hand, which had ultimate responsibility for executing U.S. policy overseas. Again, I took my direction from Secretary Pompeo and have had his consistent support in dealing with our nation's most sensitive secrets to this very day.

Stop Texting

Fifth, certain media outlets have misinterpreted my text messages where I say “stop texting” or “call me.” Any implication that I was trying to avoid making a record of our conversation is completely false. In my view, diplomacy is best handled through back-and-forth conversation. The complexity of international relations cannot be adequately expressed in cryptic text messages. I simply prefer to talk rather than to text. I do this all the time with family, friends, and former business associates. That is how I most effectively get things done. My text message comments were an invitation to talk more, not to conceal the substance of our communications.

Withholding Security Assistance

Sixth, to the best of my recollection, I do not recall any discussions with the White House on withholding U.S. security assistance from Ukraine in return for assistance with the President's 2020 re-election campaign. I recall that, in late July 2019, Ambassadors Volker and Taylor and I exchanged emails in which we all agreed that President Zelensky should have no involvement in 2020 U.S. Presidential election politics. At the same time, we all believed strongly that U.S. Security Assistance should not be withheld.

On September 9, 2019, Acting Charge de Affairs/Ambassador William Taylor raised concerns about the possibility that Ukrainians could perceive a linkage between U.S. security assistance and the President's 2020 reelection campaign.

Taking the issue seriously, and given the many versions of speculation that had been circulating about the security aid, I called President Trump directly. I asked the President: "What do you want from Ukraine?" The President responded, "Nothing. There is no quid pro quo." The President repeated: "no quid pro quo" multiple times. This was a very short call. And I recall the President was in a bad mood.

I tried hard to address Ambassador Taylor's concerns because he is a valuable and effective diplomat and I took very seriously the issues he raised. I did not want Ambassador Taylor to leave his post and generate even more turnover in the Ukraine mission. I further encouraged Ambassador Taylor to contact Secretary Pompeo, as I followed up as far as I could go. As you have seen in the press, my contemporaneous messages support my recollection.

Let me state clearly: Inviting a foreign government to undertake investigations for the purpose of influencing an upcoming U.S. election would be wrong. Withholding foreign aid in order to pressure a foreign government to take such steps would be wrong. I did not and would not ever participate in such undertakings. In my opinion, security aid to Ukraine was in our vital national interest and should not have been delayed for any reason.

CONCLUSION

Simply put, my goal has always been to advance U.S. interests in securing a strong relationship with Ukraine. I continue to see our relationship with President Zelensky as having great importance to national security, and I continue to work to strengthen our ties, advance our mutual interests, and secure a stable, prosperous Ukraine for future generations.

I will end my remarks the same way I began: Ukraine is not a dirty word. Ukraine is a fragile democracy fighting against a brutal and unscrupulous Russian neighbor. A strong Ukraine helps to uphold the norms that maintain stability and promote prosperity around the world.

It remains an honor to serve the people of the United States as their Ambassador to the European Union. I look forward to going back to work tomorrow to advance the interests of the United States of America.